**Whitehawk FC History**

Whitehawk are Brighton’s premier non-league club. Founded in 1945, the Hawks have had two periods of serious success as they have risen up the football pyramid from a team playing parks football to be within one game of an FA Cup third round tie at Everton in 2015. Between 1948 and 1952 the Hawks were promoted 4 times to reach senior county level where they remained until 2010, when three promotions in four seasons took them to just two leagues below the Football League.

The club was founded in 1945 as Whitehawk & Manor Farm Old Boys FC and joined the Brighton, Hove & District Football League, winning four titles and their first major senior trophy, the Sussex Senior Cup in 1951. This completed an unprecedented series of cup wins at junior, intermediate and senior levels in successive seasons, which still stands as a record in non-league football.

**Sussex County League 1952-2010**

The club was admitted to the Sussex County League Division 1 in 1952 and finished third in their first season. For the 54–55 season, Brighton Corporation allowed the club to move onto a permanently enclosed pitch at the north end of East Brighton Park, on what is now the home pitch, known as the Enclosed Ground. The club changed their name to Whitehawk FC for the start of the 58–59 season.

In 1962 Whitehawk won the first of four County League One titles, as well as the Sussex Senior Cup. The publicity generated by a civic reception at the Royal Pavilion led to Brighton Corporation providing a grant of £3,500 for the club to erect a self-build grandstand with space for 500, which is still used today. In 1963–64 the Hawks retained the championship.

The ground gained its first club house in 1980. The county title was won again in 1984, with the Hawks winning their last 16 games of the season. Floodlights were erected in 1988 and first used in a match organised to mark the occasion against then First Division Luton Town.

The club achieved league title success again, winning County League 1 in 2010 under Darren Freeman, to gain promotion to the Isthmian League Division One South for the first time. The Hawks also reached the semi-final of the FA Vase, losing 4-1 on aggregate to Wroxham of the Eastern Counties League Premier Division.

**Isthmian League 2010-2013**

In their first season the new level, The Hawks were in the title race but eventually had to settle for third place and an end-of-season play-off defeat on penalties to Leatherhead. The Hawks finished as Isthmian League Division One South champions the following season, as well as lifting the Sussex Senior Cup. The club achieved back-to-back promotions in 2013 by winning the Isthmian League Premier at the first attempt to earn a place in Conference South.

**National League South 2013-2018**

The Hawks struggled in their first season in Conference South. After achieving three promotions in four years, Darren Freeman was sacked in January 2014 and replaced by Steve King. The club then enjoyed their most successful season ever in 14–15, finishing fourth in Conference South and earning a place in the play-off final against Boreham Wood, which was lost 2-1 after extra time. Whitehawk completed the season with a 5–0 victory over Lewes at the Amex to lift the Sussex Senior Cup.

In 15–16 the Hawks reached the first-round of the FA Cup for the first time winning 5–3 against National League Lincoln City. Lincoln’s next FA Cup defeat the following season came in the sixth round at the Emirates Stadium against Arsenal. In the second round the Hawks drew 1–1 at League Two Dagenham & Redbridge, following a dramatic headed goal in added time by Jordan Rose, which was broadcast live by the BBC during the afternoon sports programme. In front of a record crowd of 2,174 at the Enclosed Ground, the Hawks lost the second-round replay 3-2 after taking the lead through Danny Mills. To force the match into extra time, Whitehawk again equalised dramatically in added time. The whole match was broadcast live by BT Sport. In February 2016, the club parted company with King but under Argentine Pablo Asensio, finished the season in style, only missing out on promotion in the play offs.

The next two seasons saw frequent managerial changes and over 100 different players used, culminating in the inevitable relegation for only the third time in the club’s history in 17-18. Not even the return of Steve King could arrest the club’s fortunes and when he departed at the end of the season, he was replaced by the Hawks successful U18 manager Jude Macdonald. Unfortunately, the Hawks suffered successive relegations to return to step 4 and the Isthmian South-East Division. A new management team led by ex-Haywards Heath Town boss Shaun Saunders was appointed in April 2022 and led the Hawks to promotion back to the Isthmian Premier League via the play-offs in 2023.